

Facilitating the Systemic Change Process in School Districts

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Increasingly, educators are recognizing that the conditions and educational needs of their communities are becoming dramatically different from what they were in the 1950's and 1960's. Those changing conditions and educational needs include:

- a society in which there is greater need for citizens who can understand and utilize the advancements of new technologies, sustain and advance a democratic way of life, accept the responsibility of protecting the environment, and ensure a bright future for our children,
- a workplace in which there is greater need for employees with initiative, cooperative skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, life-long learning skills, and diverse perspectives,
- a family in which there is less discipline, less communication, less caring, and more emotional, physical, and sexual abuse,
- a community in which there is more violence, more drug use, more need for civic awareness and action, and less of a sense of community and caring, and
- individuals who face more obstacles and challenges in attaining self-actualization and self-fulfillment.

Educators are also increasingly recognizing that these changes in their communities require systemic change in their educational systems, to significantly enhance their ability to meet all students' needs for coping with such a different world. However, those educators seldom have any experience in undertaking systemic change, and they are finding that it is far more difficult than the piecemeal reforms that have prevailed over the past several decades. They are finding that efforts to bring about such change in their school systems are much like a journey to a new land—a journey that is fraught with obstacles and danger.

Fortunately, enough educators have recently undertaken this type of journey to provide us with some information about the terrain, and some indication of what places to avoid and what directions to pursue. Having been on some of those journeys and studied others, the four of us are currently developing some maps of the terrain, and descriptions of some pitfalls, mountain passes, and bridges that can help a convoy to get closer to whatever destination its members may set for themselves. Those descriptions are in the form of guidance for a guide—a facilitator of the change process—who helps the members of the convoy to figure out where they want to go and how to get there.

In this article, we summarize the maps and descriptions we are developing for a guidebook of the same title as this article (Jenlink, Reigeluth, Carr, & Nelson, 1995). We begin by offering our view of the definition and purpose of **systemic change** and who our guidebook is for. Then we describe the **logic of the journey** (change process), followed by a description of some specific activities for a guide (process facilitator) to take and for the explorers and settlers (change team members and stakeholders) to engage in to decide upon their destination, plan their route, and undertake the journey. These activities (which are clustered into “events”) are of two kinds: discrete and continuous. **Discrete events** are those which are done just once, and tend to have input-output relationships with each other. That is, the result of one event is needed as input for another event to be most useful. For example, a convoy may need to cross a bridge before it can cross the mountains on the other side of it. On the other hand, **continuous events** are those for which they need to constantly

monitor the needs and conditions for the convoy and periodically take actions to address them, such as replenishing their fuel and food supplies.

Systemic Change

The purpose of systemic change is to create a better educational system than what currently exists. We define *systemic change* as an approach to change that:

- recognizes the interrelationships and interdependencies among the **parts** of the educational system, with the consequence that desired changes in one part of the system are accompanied by changes in other parts that are necessary to support those desired changes, and
- recognizes the interrelationships and interdependencies between the educational system and its **community**, including parents, employers, social service agencies, religious organizations, and much more, with the consequence that all those stakeholders are given active ownership over the change effort.

The purpose of the guidebook is to help those facilitating a change effort to create and sustain systemic change in their educational system. It helps them to learn from the failures and successes of others, so that they may avoid mistakes that have the potential to divide their community and destroy careers. It focuses on the process for change, rather than on what specific changes should be made. We believe that a community should decide what changes it needs, and that our role should be to share what we have learned about the change process—the critically important understandings, beliefs, skills, knowledge, and events for effecting a district-wide, community-based change effort.

The guidebook is intended primarily for people who want to facilitate systemic change in education. More specifically, it is for:

- People who recognize that systemic changes require changes beyond the scope of a classroom or a school building—that they require **district-level** changes as well.
- People who recognize that systemic changes require the participation of all groups in the **community** that have a stake in their educational system.
- People who realize that systemic change is difficult and who want some **guidance** as to how to go about it.

The Logic of the Journey

As a facilitator your purpose is to help a community, and its school system, to better meet all student's needs. To do this, it is important for you to help the community to develop a **vision** of their ideal educational system. Creating an ideal vision frees the stakeholders from the premise that the current system is a given and must be the foundation for whatever they develop. This ideal vision process enables participants to transcend existing mindsets and assumptions about schools and educational change, which enables the stakeholders to design a new system in a safe or neutral space.

So how can you foster the development of an ideal vision of education? One challenge is to help the stakeholders to break out of their current **mindsets** about education. Without this, they will never seriously consider a new vision. A second challenge is to help stakeholders create and take ownership in a **shared vision** of the new educational system. A third challenge is to help them develop a **passion** for their new vision. As Peter Senge (1990)

has noted, without true commitment by the stakeholders, a vision cannot sustain long-term viability and success. Each of these three challenges raises an additional question (see Figure 1).

First, how can you help stakeholders to break out of their old mindsets about education and change? One essential means is to help them **see the need** for a systemically different approach to education. Another is to foster exposure to **new approaches** to education, which can be done through readings, videos, lectures, site visits, and dialogues with all stakeholders.

Second, how can you help stakeholders to build a shared vision of education? To do this, you need to help them to reach **consensus on beliefs** about education, for they are the foundation of any vision. Since beliefs (or values) about education are likely to differ among your stakeholders, you must bring different kinds of stakeholders together to try to understand why the others believe what they do. This requires a psychological **environment** in which stakeholders feel safe in sharing their beliefs about education—an environment where everyone suspends their judgments of others while sharing. It also requires the development of **group-process skills** for dialogue, self-disclosure, listening, and conflict resolution, which takes guidance, time, and patience.

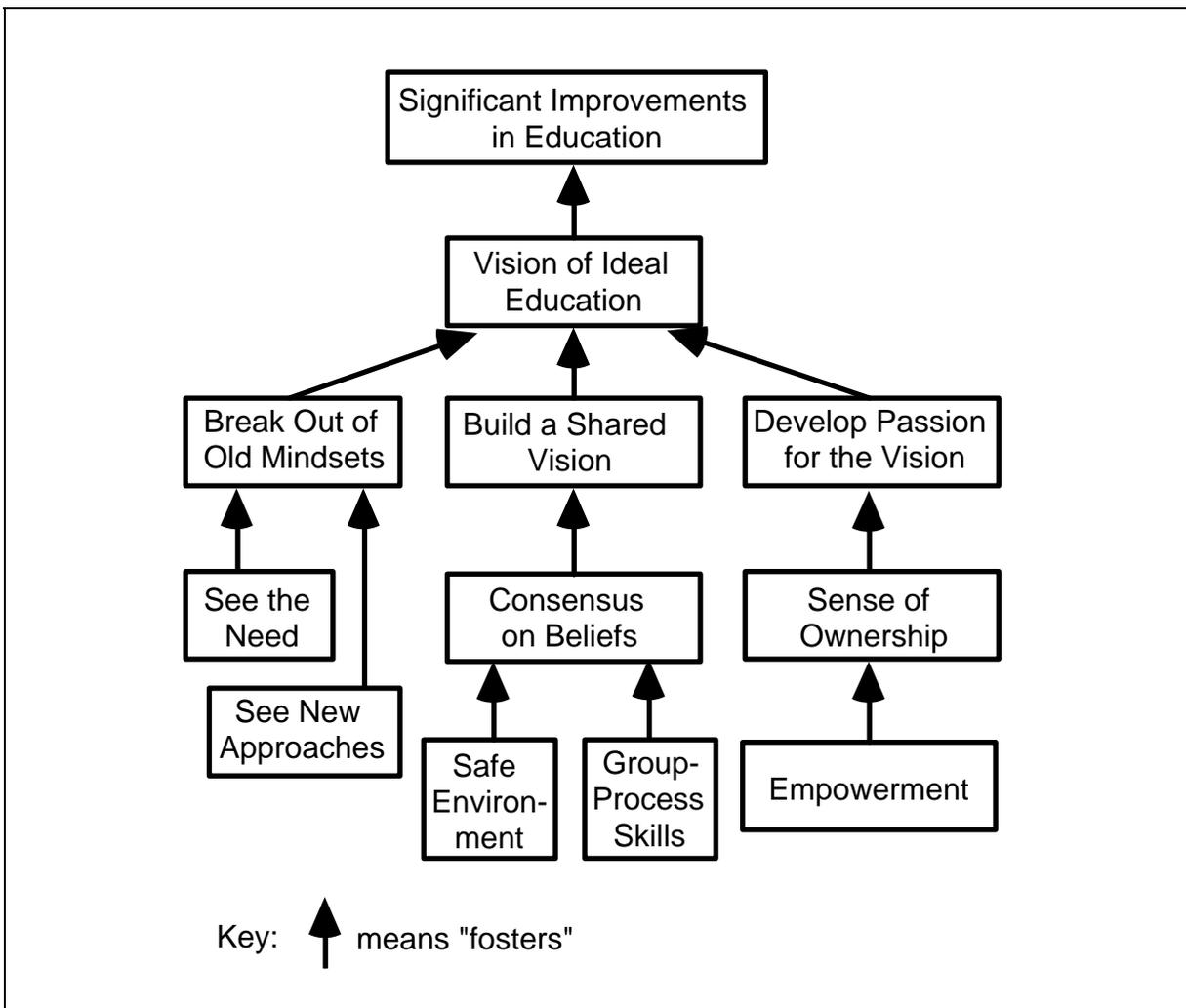


Figure 1. The logic of the systemic change process.

Third, how can you help stakeholders to develop a passion for the new vision of education? The most important consideration is to foster a sense of **ownership** of the vision, which requires their authentic participation in, responsibility for, and control over, the process by which they develop the vision. This requires that the leadership of the district be willing to step out of their old mindsets about administration, and embrace a new mindset that entails **empowering** rather than controlling.

And if all this isn't difficult enough, you also need to continuously:

- foster the stakeholders' **motivation** for the change effort,
- foster their **reflection** on, and redesign of, the change process they are using, and
- foster **two-way communication** among all stakeholders, especially with those who choose not to participate in the change process.

Discrete Events in the Journey

Discrete events are those which occur at distinct points during the change effort. They may be understood as important transition points in the process. It may be necessary to revisit a discrete event during the change effort. Given the logic and beliefs of a systemic change process, here is an overview of the discrete events that are described in Unit 2 of this book.

Process facilitation begins with you, the facilitator, assessing your own readiness to serve as a process guide, and then conducting an assessment of the district's readiness for systemic change. From there, you assist stakeholders in understanding and changing their existing beliefs, assumptions, and mindsets—changing individually, in groups, and as a district (school system and community). And along the way, you find yourself continuously growing and changing—co-evolving—in concert with the stakeholders as they design a new educational system for their children.

Assess Readiness and Capacity

1. Assess and enhance your readiness to be a facilitator. Before you take on the responsibility of facilitating systemic change, it is important for you to conduct a self-assessment of your readiness and to design a professional development program based on the needs you identify in that self-assessment. The self-assessment is based on competencies in three broad areas: skills and knowledge, personal growth and change, and group process. For each competency, we provide a set of questions to help you assign a rating to a scale, and all the scales comprise a profile of your readiness. Designing a professional development program entails you determining which areas require additional professional development as a *prerequisite* to facilitating systemic change and which areas require ongoing development *throughout* the change effort. You also figure out how to enhance your development within each area that needs it, both before and throughout the change effort. Finally, you initiate this program before entering into a formal relationship with a school district, and continue the program, periodically reassessing your development and redesigning the development program as required to successfully facilitate the district's change effort. You should help

every person involved in process facilitation to similarly assess and enhance her/his capabilities as a process facilitator.

2. Establish or redefine your relationship with a school district. If you have no relationship with a district, then it is your responsibility to identify a school district that you might want to work with, talking with the contact person by phone, making a site visit, and deciding whether or not to proceed to a more time-consuming assessment of the district's readiness for systemic change. If you decide yes, then you enter into a preliminary agreement for conducting a district readiness assessment. If you already have a relationship with a district, this event entails: you attempting to analyze your relationship with key leaders, deciding whether or not to proceed to the next event, and if yes, developing a plan for redefining your relationships, and entering into an agreement for assessing the district's readiness for change.

3. Assess the district's readiness for change and negotiate a formal agreement. To accomplish this, establish a set of criteria by looking at documents and interviewing key people. You also help those people to acquire a better understanding of the need for, and nature of, a systemic change effort. Finally, you make the decision to enter into a formal relationship with the key leaders of the school district for facilitating their systemic change effort.

4. Assess the district's capacity for change. In this event you meet with various stakeholder groups within the district and community to identify the baseline of existing and lacking capacities for systemic change, you gather personality profiles and skill inventories, and you communicate understandings about the change process.

Prepare the Initial Core Team

5. Select the participants for the Core Team. As facilitator, you should adapt the criteria and selection process for the Core Team to your situation with the help of key district leaders, identifying types of people for the Core Team, selecting the initial slate and alternates with the help of key leaders, meeting with individuals to make sure they will all be appropriate, recruiting the members, and announcing the team membership to the public, all while creating a good public awareness and image of what is going on. If you are an internal facilitator with political "baggage," some special precautions should be heeded.

6. Create the Core Team dynamic. Accomplish this by designing and facilitating a team development process to build the team at a two-day retreat in which all Core Team members work together to develop a team culture and essential teaming skills and knowledge. This is a time for bonding and building relationships, a time for creating a sensitivity to personal beliefs, and a time for beginning to create a core of shared beliefs. This team development process will become an experience base for the Core Team to later design additional team-building experiences for new teams.

7. Train the initial Core Team in systems design. The key responsibility at this point lies in your assisting the Core Team to develop a skill and knowledge base for educational systems design. Included are attention to systems theory, practice, and various models of systems design. Core Team members learn the importance of stakeholder involvement in change and develop a deep understanding and appreciation for the user-designer approach to systems design. Also, you help the Core Team to begin communicating broadly among all

stakeholders the meaning of systems design and the importance of systems design to systemic change.

8. Design events 9-11. As facilitator you guide the Core Team through an important transition in their role by assisting their selection and redesign of Events 9-11. Here you begin to foster an understanding of the *just-in-time* approach, as well as the importance of developing the appropriate skills and knowledge for each event that they design.

9. Identify competing change efforts. You can accomplish this by helping the Core Team to identify existing and potentially competing change efforts in the district. You foster an understanding among Core Team members of the importance of identifying competing change efforts. You also help them identify where district resources are currently being directed with respect to change. You approach those stakeholders who have the most investment in the competing change efforts, and you foster an understanding of the importance of suspending those change efforts until the need for them emerges out of the systemic change process. The Core Team also starts to establish a relationship with each building in the school system and to build a positive image of the Core Team.

10. Evaluate openness to change. As facilitator, your responsibility is to assist the Core Team in evaluating the level of openness to change that exists in the district (school system and community). They also identify why the district is open or closed to change, including an understanding of the past history of successful and unsuccessful change efforts.

11. Evaluate the existing culture for change. This event entails you facilitating the Core Team in evaluating the existing beliefs, assumptions, and mindsets about educational change. You foster an understanding of what a culture of change is, and the importance of the language of change used by stakeholders in the district.

12. Design the process for expanding the Core Team. At this decision point, the Core Team determines whether to expand itself into the Decisioning Team first or the Design Team first. The Decisioning Team is relatively large (20-25 people) so as to have broad stakeholder and power-broker involvement, and this team has as much decision-making authority as the school board can and will empower them with. In contrast, the Design Team is a much smaller group (8-12 people) of respected innovators and creative thinkers who can devote much more time to designing a new educational system for the Decisioning Team. In this event, the Core Team also designs the process for forming and norming these two teams.

Prepare the Expanded Teams

13. Expand and build the Decisioning Team. This event, if done before Event 14, entails expanding the Core Team to approximately 20 members, which includes a broad representation of all stakeholder groups. You foster an understanding of the role of the Decisioning Team in the systemic change effort. Included in this event is a similar two-day retreat as was used to build the Core Team, including identifying personality profiles and identifying common beliefs (Event 6). The Core Team then facilitates the development of a skill and knowledge base for participants on the team (similar to Event 7), and develops skills and knowledge for decisioning systemically. The Core Team also shares the results of all prior evaluations, and the Decisioning Team designs its own mode of operation.

14. Select and build the Design Team. This event, if done after Event 13, entails spinning off about five members of the Decisioning Team to serve on the Design Team as well. These five form a nucleus that is expanded into the Design Team of approximately 10 people. You also foster an understanding of the role of the Design Team in the systemic change effort. The Decisioning Team designs a similar team-building experience (two-day retreat) as it went through, followed by a similar skill- and knowledge-building experience (Event 13). Finally, the Design Team designs its own mode of operation, subject to the approval of the Decisioning Team. If Events 13 and 14 are done in reverse order, the Core Team expands into the Design Team, which eventually spins off about five members to form the nucleus of the Decisioning Team.

15. Train and enculturate the Design Team. Accomplish this by facilitating additional training for the Design Team, primarily with respect to applications of the systems theory, systems practice, and various models of systems design that they learned about in Event 14 (see Event 7). The Design Team also explores alternative views and approaches to the change process, such as user-designer vs. expert-designer, interactive vs. noninteractive, designing vs. planning, and outside-in vs. inside-out.

16. Redesign the change process. Using what they have learned in Event 15, and what is provided in this guidebook for Events 17-24, the Design Team redesigns its own design process. You engage team members, as user-designers, in understanding their role and responsibility in self-evaluation. You also foster understanding of how evaluation is an important part of individual, team, and organizational learning within the systemic change effort.

Design a New System

17. Evolve mindsets about education. It is important that you, as facilitator, foster an understanding of what a mindset is, and how mindsets contribute to our perceptions of education. You also help the Design and Decisioning Team members to identify their own mindsets, and to leap out of their existing mindsets about education. You foster an understanding of different approaches to education and the changes in society which have created the need for systemic change. Understanding that mindsets are grounded in beliefs and assumptions is important, as is understanding that mindsets reflect not only our conceptual understanding but the strategies or methods we use to understand education.

18. Explore ideal beliefs and assumptions about education. Moving into the design process, your responsibility is one of assisting the Design Team (and subsequently the Decisioning Team) in developing a core set of ideal beliefs and assumptions about education

which they want to see throughout their new system. You foster among the Design Team, Decisioning Team, and broader community of stakeholders, an understanding of, and appreciation for, ideal design. It is important, during this event, that the Design Team interact with other stakeholders in assessing (and helping to evolve) what beliefs and assumptions are most important. You also foster an understanding of how shared beliefs and assumptions contribute a strong foundation for the next steps in the design process.

19. Select and build multiple design teams. You, as facilitator, assist the Design Team to plan and implement the self-selection of small design teams based on individuals' beliefs within the framework of the district-wide beliefs. Then each of the new teams needs to go through a team-building process in a 2-day retreat (redesigned by the design team) and development of appropriate skills and knowledge (see Event 14). Finally, the results of all the prior evaluations are shared with the new teams, and they design their own modes of operation, with frequent communication with the district-wide Design Team.

20. Explore ideal visions based on the common beliefs. Here it is important for you to assist and co-facilitate the district-wide Design Team members to facilitate each design team in the process of reaching consensus on the particular beliefs about learning and education that they would like their "school" (to use the word loosely) to reflect, within the framework of the district-wide beliefs. The district-wide Design Team members also help each team to create their own ideal vision based on their common beliefs and assumptions, starting with what learning experiences they want to foster, and then the instructional system that will best support those learning experiences. This event involves fostering an understanding of the role of ideal visions in bringing about systemic change and how stakeholder participation is key to creating commitment to the ideal vision. Each design team communicates its ideal vision broadly with all stakeholder groups and foster their understanding and ownership of the vision.

21. Develop a system for evaluating the results of the change process. As facilitator, you will assist the district-wide Design Team members to help each design team to develop an evaluation system for its new design. This includes developing an understanding of the role of critical examination, reflection, positive feedback systems, and self-renewal as part of the evaluation process. It is important that all stakeholders have clear agreement as to what is important to evaluate and what is not.

22. Design a system of functions for each ideal vision. At this point in the process each design team identifies and designs a set of functions to attain its vision of a new educational system. The district-wide Design Team members facilitate an understanding of a function within a system, and guide the design team members in moving from general levels of system function to more specific, detailed levels of subfunctions, and so on. They also foster an understanding of the interconnected and interrelated nature of the various subsystem functions and how they work together to enable the system to achieve its purposes.

23. Design the components for accomplishing each function. In this event every design team designs each component necessary to accomplish each function of the new system. The progression from vision to functions to components is a gradual process of developing greater detail on a holistic image of the new system. This way, the parts are always designed to be compatible with each other.

24. Design the administrative and governance systems. All the design teams come together with the district-wide Design Team to design the site-based and district-wide administrative and governance systems, with regular input from the Decisioning Team.

Implement and Evolve the New System

25. Develop a plan for evolving to the new system. It is likely that many aspects of the ideal system will not be immediately attainable, so each design team has to figure out how to evolve ever closer to the ideal over time, while trying to minimize incompatibilities between the early elements of the new system and the remaining elements of the old system. This is similar to a strategic plan, but is developed and adopted by all the stakeholders, not the just the administration.

26. Evolve, evaluate, and revise the new system. It is here that you will facilitate the design teams and other stakeholders in implementing the plan, evaluating and revising the plan while it is being implemented, and evaluating and revising the new system as it evolves, using an evolving version of the evaluation system designed in Event 21. Also, as the new system evolves closer to the ideal, new possibilities and problems will emerge, so it is wise to periodically revisit and revise the ideal design as well.

Continuous Events in the Journey

Continuous events differ in one important way from the previous list of discrete events. As a facilitator you find it important to continually engage in these activities throughout the change effort. And these events are not only for participants, they are equally important to you as a facilitator. Imagine a child at a birthday party, playing a game with lots of balloons. The object is to keep all of the balloons from touching the floor. So the child is constantly looking to see which balloons are the lowest and pushes them up. In a similar way, a facilitator (and eventually all the participants) needs to constantly monitor the continuous needs of a systemic change process and bolster those needs which fall below a critical threshold. If you don't have enough time and resources to keep all the balloons in the air, you had better get more, or the change effort is highly unlikely to succeed.

Given the beliefs and logic of a systemic change process, here is an overview of the continuous events that are described in Unit 3 of this book.

A. Evaluate and improve the change process. Systemic change requires that participants continuously evaluate the change process in order to improve it. You nurture an understanding of systemic evaluation as a critical process for improving all aspects of the systemic change effort. Included here is an understanding of evaluation that moves beyond program evaluation models and seeks to function as a positive-feedback system for learning, self-correction, and formative development of the change process. This continuous event is initiated during Event 1.

B. Build and maintain political support. The role of facilitator is that of assisting in continuously negotiating political issues and achieving positive political support for the systemic change effort. Your role is to nurture an understanding of, and respect for, the politics of change, and to nurture the development of necessary skills and knowledge to prepare the participants to do so. This continuous event is initiated during Event 2.

C. Sustain motivation. This is accomplished by teams continuously monitoring and sustaining their motivation for systemic change. Systemic change requires a sustained energy created by a balance of extrinsic motivation and deep intrinsic motivation that attends to the beliefs, and identifies with the purpose, of systemic change. You as facilitator continuously

foster participants' understanding of the importance that motivation plays in the change process, and you develop the skills and knowledge necessary to monitor and enhance their motivation. This continuous event is initiated during Event 2.

D. Develop and sustain appropriate leadership. The mindset of leadership must be continuously evolving from a top-down, authoritarian approach to leadership to an approach that is more empowering and supportive. You nurture an understanding of the need for and nature of this new approach to leadership for systemic change, as well as nurturing the necessary skills and knowledge to effect this evolution. It includes building and sustaining participatory models of leadership, which lead to empowerment and self-renewal. This continuous event is initiated during Event 2.

E. Build and maintain trust. Creating a supportive environment for change requires participants who are continuously building and sustaining trust among people, as well as between the change effort and individuals in the school system and community. You nurture an understanding of what trust is, and how trust figures into building successful relationships within and across the change effort. You also nurture the development of skills and knowledge essential to do so. This continuous event is initiated during Event 2.

F. Evolve mindset and culture. Participants must continuously evolve their mindsets and culture regarding both education and the change process. You as facilitator continuously help stakeholders, as user-designers, to develop an appreciation for, and understanding of, the need to continuously evolve their individual and collective mindsets, and the implication this holds for changing culture. And you help them to engage in the dialogue that is essential for this evolution to occur. This continuous event is initiated during Event 2.

G. Periodically secure necessary resources. This is accomplished by continuously identifying and securing the types of resources essential to successful systemic change throughout the change effort. Your role is to nurture the required skills and knowledge for doing this. This continuous event is initiated during Event 2.

H. Develop skills in systems thinking. In this event participants continuously develop their skills and knowledge in systems thinking. You as facilitator help them to understand the interrelatedness of all the various parts of an educational system and between an educational system and its community, and you help them to acquire the basic concepts and principles of systems theory. This continuous event is initiated during Event 3.

I. Periodically and appropriately allocate necessary resources. Sustaining the process of change relies, in part, on continuously allocating resources to the systemic change effort. Your role is to nurture skills and knowledge for identifying the resources needed and maximizing the use of the resources available. This continuous event is initiated during Event 3.

J. Develop group-process and team-building skills. Throughout the change effort, participants must continuously develop their skills and knowledge in group process and team building. You help them to recognize and understand the key role that groups and teams play in effecting systemic change, and the importance of those groups and teams devoting time and energy to learning to perform in a healthy and positive manner. This learning also helps to build and sustain community. This continuous event is initiated during Event 6.

K. Build team spirit. All participants must continuously engage in developing an understanding and appreciation of team spirit in systemic change. Your role is to nurture the required skills and knowledge to build and sustain team spirit. This continuous event is initiated during Event 6.

L. Engage in self-disclosure. In this event participants continuously engaging in self-disclosure as it applies to dialogue, design conversation, and other processes wherein sharing personal beliefs, assumptions, and mindsets is essential to building and sustaining a systemic change effort. You foster an understanding of the importance of self-disclosure in systemic change, and nurture the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in self-disclosing. This continuous event is initiated during Event 6.

M. Engage in reflection. Learning to change requires that participants engage continuously in individual and collective reflection as a key process in systemic change. You nurture in them a self-reflective ethic and self-reflection skills. This continuous event is initiated during Event 6.

N. Develop design skills. In this event participants continuously develop their skills and knowledge in the theory and practice of educational systems design, especially design skills, so that they can undertake the responsibility of being user-designers for the new educational system. You help them to understand the importance of design in a systemic change process, and you help them to acquire the basic concepts, principles, and processes of educational systems design. This continuous event is initiated during Event 7.

O. Communicate with stakeholders (2-way). Creating change requires participants continuously develop their communication skills and knowledge as they apply to systemic change. Included are the importance of open communication systems, which use a common language of change, and appropriate conventions of conversation for effecting systemic change. Your role is to nurture this development. This continuous event is initiated during Event 9.

P. Build and evolve community. This is accomplished by participants continuously developing an understanding of what a community is and how it differs from other forms of collectives, such as groups and teams. It includes developing the skills and knowledge for building and sustaining a learning community for working on systemic change. This continuous event is initiated during Event 9.

Q. Foster organizational learning. Learning, as a critical process, requires that participants continuously develop their skills and knowledge about different types of organizational learning, and how they relate to the systemic change effort. Included is developing an understanding of how individual and team learning contribute to organizational learning. Adaptive, generative, and design learning are also explored. Your role is to nurture these processes. This continuous event is initiated during Event 9.

R. Build an organizational memory. Changing a system is about changing the its old patterns or memory. This requires developing the knowledge required to understand how schools build and maintain organizational memories over time. You help participants examine how organizational memory contributes to resistance to change, and how this memory may be used to facilitate systemic change in education. This continuous event is initiated during Event 9.

Conclusion

Each event in both the discrete and continuous categories is typically made up of several actions (for individuals to engage in) and activities (for a team to engage in), and each of those actions and activities is typically comprised of about 10 pages of detailed guidelines. This guidance is based on our experience and the related literature, but we are also currently

engaged in several field tests of the guidance system. We anticipate that we will continuously update the guidebook—which is in the form of a three-ring binder—much as software companies are constantly producing new versions of their software. We also intend to produce it in the form of an electronic guidance support system, using hypermedia. In this way, we hope it will become ever more powerful as a tool for helping school districts and their communities to bring about quantum improvements in their educational systems.

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